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ABSTRACT

Headteachers in the United Kingdom face the challenge of acting as both the main strategic planner for the whole school and as the leading professional practitioner within it. This paper describes how general changes in the occupational characteristics of school headteachers have been contingently interpreted in a large urban primary school in England. It relates how one headteacher attempted to balance an urgent requirement to prepare the school for inspection with her long-term aim to facilitate individual staff contributions to school development. Data, obtained between November 1995 and April 1996, were gathered through document review; observation; and interviews with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, eight teachers, other school staff, a member of the governing board, and an external consultant. The paper describes how the headteacher's main concerns involved the tensions within the following functions: (1) being both a manager of teachers and a fellow teacher; (2) engaging in both surveillance and professional communication; (3) responding to both individuals' professional development needs and those of the staff as a whole; (4) seeking external affirmation and avoiding external threat; (5) encouraging participation and determining outcomes; and (6) controlling decision making and encouraging teacher contributions. The paper offers two examples of how the headteacher creatively coped with the pressures of headship: first, to transform external regulation into a resource and to enhance her control, and second, to accomplish an acceptable self-identity in constrained circumstances. (Contains 23 references.) (LMI)

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# School leadership in changing times : coping creatively with power and accomplishing an acceptable self-identity

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# School leadership in changing times : coping creatively with power and accomplishing an acceptable self identity

**Colin Biott, University of Northumbria, UK.**
**Franz Rauch, University of Klagenfurt, Austria**

## Introduction

This paper is based on a case study of a large urban primary school in England during a six month period prior to an external inspection by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) . The case study was carried out within the framework of a European Union funded research project "Management for Organisational and Human Development" (MOHD), which has investigated relationships between individuals and their organisations. It was selected initially as one of a set of sites in which to investigate how managers and middle managers were developing action research approaches to organisational development. However, due to the dominating influence of the impending external inspection, the focus of the fieldwork shifted. It traced a complex interplay between the headteacher's attempt to address an urgent requirement to prepare the school for inspection and her longer term aim to enable individual staff to contribute to school development. In her pressing concern to present the school favourably in the competitive market- place she does reveal tendencies similar to those of Troman's (1996) middle school headteacher who saw himself as a 'managing director', and Hellawell's (1990) primary heads who saw themselves as 'line managers'. Yet, simultaneously and tenaciously, she also clings to her preferred identity as a leading professional in a collegial school.

The paper raises issues of changing professional and managerial authority to which there have been different responses in small and medium sized organisations in the UK National Health and Education Services. Comparisons between the ways in which these changes have been experienced by general medical practitioners and headteachers highlight the weight of new demands upon the latter. For example, since the introduction of the Charter for the Family Doctor Service, in 1965, local doctors have joined together to form partnerships in larger health centres and expanded the numbers of staff they have employed. By the early 1990s, due to increasing marketisation, these centres were being managed by a new breed of entrepreneurial Practice Managers, a role which was : " *evolving at breakneck speed with, in many cases, considerable autonomy in running practices - practices which have turnovers similar to small and medium sized businesses* " ( Macmillan and Pringle 1993 : p39). Recent research into the management of family doctor practices has shown how increasing competitive pressures and 'business talk' of budget setting, purchasers, providers and customers , has meant that relationships between doctors and managers have often become strained. Newton, Hunt and Stirling (1996) conclude that those doctors "*who would wish to maintain the character of general practice as personal, small scale and informal ... will have to consider their ability to sustain such a culture in an environment heavily influenced by government initiated change* " (p 84 ). Because of a growing divide between nose-down, preoccupied professionals and managers taking a broad view from higher ground, it is :

*" not easy to foster a sense of corporateness in organisations dominated by a professional core. This is not so much a case of managers and professionals being unable to 'get together', as to professionals being so preoccupied with their work tasks that they are unable to develop a sense of the practice as a whole requiring strategic direction"* (p84)

Yet, such an uneasy combination of being the main strategic planner for a whole organisation as well as the leading professional practitioner within it, is the very essence of the complex challenge now facing headteachers in UK schools. Bowe, Ball and Gold (1992) have argued that UK headteachers have become objects as well as agents of change as : *" they are being encouraged to be more self-determining, entrepreneurial, cost effective and consumer orientated "* (p 140). Referring to the consequences of recent reform, they note changes in relationships between teachers and managers in schools :

*" It is as much about the redistribution of power and privileges within institutions as it is about redistribution between them"* (p142) (authors' emphasis)

Moller (1996) has noted a similar trend following restructuring in Norway, where new constructs of educational leaders as school entrepreneurs or as chief executives are also growing in prominence. Using an interactive action research approach with 27 school leaders, she identified two kinds of dilemmas : *" dilemmas related to control and steering issues and dilemmas related to loyalty "* ( p3).

The purpose of this paper is to show how general changes in the occupational characteristics of school headteachers have been interpreted contingently in one school. It shows how one headteacher coped creatively with changing circumstances. Woods and Jeffries (1996) have noted how classroom teachers have found creative ways to reformulate imposed problems and overcome attempted managerialist oppression :

*" There is a kind of political activism here, not one characterised by attempts to engage directly in trying to change policy, but as articulated in the course of everyday interaction. Its importance lies in the exercise of power, and in the production of a truth and knowledge within which their professional selves can work. "* (p53)

We have taken a similar look at the way a headteacher has coped with changing power relations her daily work. Like Moller we recognise that *"educational administrators are both oppressors and oppressed"* (p20) and we have assumed that power is negotiated and contested, rather than being simply and directly inflicted on headteachers by external mandate or inflicted by headteachers upon staff in their schools by dint of their hierarchical office. In our case study, power relations are seen to be emergent within the opportunities taken by the headteacher to transform her dilemmas.

The headteacher's role can be analysed through exploring how uncertainty is created, experienced and dealt with in the school, particularly how external rule frames are used resourcefully for internal control. This gives us an important clue to the relationship between structure and agency in this case study. As Altrichter and Salzgeber (1996) have argued, social change has two faces, in that new rules on the structural side can give rise to new resources, skills and abilities being mobilised on the side of personal agency. We have tried to uncover

ways in which structure, power, personal agency and identity are inter-related and shaped in subtle and changing ways.

Following a brief description of the research process and of the school we outline the dilemmas expressed in interviews with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and other members of staff. We then offer two examples of processes of creative coping to show how the headteacher was transforming external regulation into a resource to enhance her own control and finally to suggest how she was accomplishing an acceptable self identity in constrained circumstances.

**Research process**

The fieldwork was conducted between November 1995 and April 1996. It was based on ethnographic methods with participative elements, taking the interests of the school into consideration and guided by agreements made with the headteacher and deputy headteacher. Like Moller in her Norwegian study, we have tried to bring together the insiders' frameworks of meaning with our own outsiders' perspective. Through discussions with the headteacher about our earlier analyses and feedback reports we have tried to generate a 'third framework' of the situation ( Elden and Levin 1991).

The data for the case study consist of school documents, interviews and observation fieldnotes recorded in a diary. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, eight teachers, a classroom assistant, secretaries, a member of governing board, and an external consultant from an industrial company. The headteacher's interviews were extended to allow for narrative accounts involving reflexive reconstructions and justificatory accounts, which alerted us to the syntax of narrative and its value in understanding school leadership in a personal, organisational and broad structural context. Observations were made of meetings of the management team, various curriculum teams and the whole staff; as well as of classes in progress. Informal talks with teachers and general field observations were also recorded in a research diary.

The school was inspected in May 1996 ( one month after our case study fieldwork) by a team of eight OFSTED inspectors. In our paper we have made some reference to the subsequent official report as additional documentary evidence.

**Short description of the school**

The school has 514 pupils (257 boys, 257 girls) and 34 teachers It was formed in 1993 by the merger of the infant and junior schools. It is housed in two separate ninety year old brick buildings in a large city in northern England. Most of the pupils come from the nearby community which is of mixed social and multicultural backgrounds. There is a high proportion of private rented accomodation in the area. About 42% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. Nearly 290 pupils come from homes where English is an additional language. Although pupils' first language is mainly Urdu, Punjabi, Bengali or Hindu, up to 15 languages are spoken in the community. Special earmarked funding (available from Section 11) is used to provide support for 50 pupils. Although on entry to the school some pupils have poorly developed language and social skills, and others do not understand English, some pupils are able to tackle the National Curriculum and are above average ability. In 1995, 59% of pupils did not have nursery education.

Recently, as in other primary schools nearby, many of its most able pupils have sought transfers to other schools. This is mainly because a local secondary school failed its recent OFSTED inspection, and parents of older primary school children seek places for their children in schools which feed a more successful secondary school in another part of the city.

**School aims, values and standards**

Throughout conversations with the head and deputy both repeatedly stressed the optimal fostering of all pupils as the school's most basic task.

When the headteacher talks about her work, we can discern an underlying dual concern for both competitiveness and social justice. Her aspirations for the school are expressed, on the one hand, by the motto 'One world. One family. Our school', which reflects plurality and learning together, whilst, on the other hand, she emphasises children's individual achievement and espouses market-led competitiveness : *'I want to have the best school in ( the city) ... high standards.'*

The subsequent report of the OFSTED inspectors does confirm that the school has both good standards of individual achievement along with a good local reputation for caring for the needs of all children. The case study data show that all staff describe their working conditions as becoming more and more difficult and challenging, yet the 1996 OFSTED inpection report describes it as a *'good school which has a number of very good and excellent features'*. It refers to the good local reputation of the school :

*The overwhelming response of the parents' meeting was one which was supportive of the school, with particular reference by the parents to its outstanding multicultural ethos, its happy and welcoming atmosphere where they felt their children achieved their full potential. They felt this was because of the clear understanding by the school of the direction in which it was moving and the caring headteacher and her staff. ( Para 145)*

Standards of achievement are described in the OFSTED report as " *satisfactory or better in nearly three quarters of the lessons seen (126) and of these a minority are very good or excellent".*

**Dilemmas**

Like Moller (1996) and Bowe et al (1992) we found that the complexity of the headteacher's role can be conveyed through her key dilemmas. In this case the main concerns lay between :

- 'looking down from the top' and belonging as a member or fellow professional;
- surveillance and professional communication;
- responding to individual's professional development needs and steering whole staff development;
- seeking external affirmation and avoiding external threat;
- encouraging participation and determining outcomes; and
- control and contribution.

**Between 'looking down from the top' and belonging as a member or fellow professional**

The headteacher was aware of 'looking down from the top', to carry out a kind of surveillance of standards. At the same time she was also trying to belong, as a 'curriculum leader' or professional leader, amongst colleagues, who will think for themselves :

*'Well, I manage by walking around, watching and looking ... and for me I want to have the best school in the city... high standards, and to move towards my goal I walk around ... I walk into classes, I talk to children, I talk to parents, and gather views from that ... I take the helicopter view: just sit back and think of myself from the top and I look down to see what's happening and I watch people, I watch people in the staffroom, I watch for groups and I manage a lot by intuition ... I sense many things ... and within that I do believe a lot in people making their own destinies ... I want a system whereby people can develop with innovation and wherever they do that I will back them ... but I am aware it's the culture and I think we are coming into the stage where the culture is ready to support future things where people think for themselves ... another (part of my) style of management is that I do read a lot. I read a lot of research papers and things about the curriculum. I still see myself as the curriculum leader, I am very involved in the curriculum.'*

The teachers also referred frequently to the headteacher as both a member and professional leader :

*'I think (she) knows how to get people on the management team to work straight forward ... she treats people well, talks to people, shares everything with people ... she is very open ... she is very well organised in the way that she got things like the quality system going ... management meetings ... communicating ideas and giving people all sorts of information ... feedback from courses, just keeping ... I think she is really good and knows a lot ...'*

*'She gave us a lot of feedback of what she would like to see in place ... very helpful with any problems with children ...'*

*'One of (the headteacher's) strengths is, she can just go along, she might not have the knowledge herself or she might not have the idea herself but she has the ability to take things in, use them and put them out again ... a sort of a clearing house ...'*

The teachers value the headteacher's 'knowledge of educational practice' and her 'process knowledge' of how to get things done ; two of the six categories of knowledge which Eraut (1994, pp. 75-99) cites as being important for heads and which gives them a leading professional role.

**Between surveillance and professional communication**

Both the headteacher and the deputy consciously try to make their presence pervade the school, being watchful, maintaining close and constant contact with colleagues, pupils and, where possible, with parents and the community, too. For example, the headteacher observes classes, talks with children, and gives feedback to teachers, moving about the school to snatch brief conversations, interconnected over time, with children, teachers and parents. She describes this as professional communication, but she is conscious of sometimes being judgemental :

*'I would think very carefully about how I would approach things with staff. I have seen absolutely poor lessons, rubbish, I can't believe that was our school. Now I have to be very careful how to feed that back to those teachers.'*

and of having to choose when to try to foster reflection, and when to tell teachers directly what she wants them to do :

*'I think I use a great variety ... I use " Have-you-thought-about-this-bit'... I use, 'Well-I-am-sorry-but-you-have-to-got-to-do-this-bit'... I do try to keep staff informed, (about) a lot of things which we have no control over, all the external influences ... well, I need to talk to them quietly ... '*

**Between responding to individual's professional development needs and steering whole staff development**

In this school, each teacher is granted half a day per week release from teaching to be used for personal development. This is made organisationally possible by providing specialist teaching in French, music and physical education.

In the first year following the amalgamation, the head conducted staff development interviews with each of the teachers. At that time she anticipated little or no tension between their personal concerns and those of the school as a whole. She intended that these interviews would provide the basis for reflections by the teachers to enable them to identify their own development needs, and also to provide her with an opportunity to evaluate the prevailing conditions in the school.

However, when a tailored training programme was set up, only some of the teachers actually took part in it and it was apparent that there was some conflict between their personal interests and the management agenda. *'What I have to say is that (the deputy) and I were disappointed by the people ... the chat, on paper and the reality were mismatched ... We realised that we had given them too much choice ... '*

This whole school training and review programme had been described as personal and practical development by means of action research. Each teacher was to choose an issue related to his or her own experience, then collect , analyse and interpret data relevant to the issue, after which the various results were to be exchanged during a two-day seminar. The intention was to embed action research into the work of existing curriculum teams.

Because of impelling accountability demands, calling for prompt action, the head and deputy felt a need to determine specifically how, or whether, the knowledge obtained at external courses was actually being applied in the school. As a consequence, more recent staff training has been geared closely to the immediate needs of the school as a whole. One factor influencing this decision seems to be have been the report of an investigation conducted by an industrial consultant for personal development, and assessor for a national quality assurance scheme 'Investors in People', who is also a member of the school's Board of Governors. The main conclusion of her report was that:

*'There is no doubt that the Managers and staff of ..... Primary School are committed to Training and Development. The work already carried out is most appreciated by all staff interviewed and from the results of the questionnaires. What does seem unclear is how this links in with the overall development of the school as an entity in its own right.'* (confidential, internal report)

Whilst the majority of the teachers did describe the headteacher as very supportive of their individual development, one also explicitly referred to a problem:

*'I think (the headteacher) has a lot of good qualities, she is very strong, very efficient, has a lot of good ideas. If my criticism would come at all, it is that I think she wants to have her own ideas going through. They might be the best, she certainly thinks they are the best. I don't feel that lots of people who have got ideas are always given that chance to show some initiative. I think there are a lot of people who are undervalued. That is my main criticism if you like.'*

We were told by teachers that they were learning with colleagues within their own semi-formal meetings, but two interviewees did express a growing wish among teachers to be given more opportunities to discuss general, fundamental issues at the formal meetings of the whole staff :

*'I know that people wish to say things ... simply to clear things ... but (the head) doesn't want to do that in staff meetings .... she wants problems or confusions or whatever to come back to year group leaders ... it's very in that way ... she says, that in a staff meeting with 35 people there was no time or space to debate ...'*

*'I think there are times when just any member of staff feels they want to say something or ask something, and not always go through these channels. I think a few people have felt they wanted a staff meeting where they are not just sitting, they want to contribute. They might just have come here for a term, but they might have something to say. I think there needs to be more of an open forum now and again, and I know sometimes that can become a waste of time, sometimes people chatting on and nothing gets done, but I think that that opportunity needs to be there at least occasionally.'*

**Between seeking external affirmation and avoiding external threat**

The interviews reveal two main views of the external environment of the school, both of which are characterised by openness, optimism and contructiveness. First, potential threats (such as OFSTED inspections, a new National Curriculum and changes in the local catchment area) are all seen as an impetus to generate greater effort and motivation, to achieve recognition for high standards, and to aim high. Second, external agencies such as businesses and universities are seen as offering possibilities for co-operative links, consultancy and training.

Positive responses to external challenges are evident, for example, in several curriculum initiatives which have produced materials and documents in fields such as writing, reading, maths, assessment, support-structures for special needs and bilingual children, and the active inclusion of students' multicultural backgrounds. This openness to external support has also led to several close contacts with local universities in connection with initial teacher training, INSET programmes and research projects. In addition, some business practices are being introduced as a way of trying to integrate financial planning with school development and of clarifying chains of decision making. One example of the latter is the establishment of a

Quality Management System which was adapted and implemented from the business sector with the help of an experienced industrial consultant. This tendency to import quality systems is discussed later in relation to the interplay of the *theme* of continuity and the intensification of *action* projects which flag the efficiency of the school and demonstrate its connections with the world of business, commerce and markets.

This use of a range of external, industrial consultants to assess training, to introduce and audit 'quality' procedures, serves to testify that progress is being made and, overall, it symbolises the headteacher's concern for external comparison. According to Pava (1986), this use of 'outside witness' is common in non-synoptic change processes.

Looked at in one way, this may be helping her to develop what Eraut (1994) has called 'control knowledge' which enables her to control her own behaviour rather than that of others. Control knowledge, for Eraut, includes self-knowledge about one's strengths and weaknesses, the gap between what one says and what one does, self management, prioritisation and delegation, and self development in the broadest sense including knowing how to learn. Looked at another way, her concern for external witness has talked the school into a quality image, and, in turn, it has kept teachers on show, on their toes and vulnerable to negative judgements as well as praise and affirmation.

**Between encouraging participation and determining outcomes**

This dilemma is reflected in the ways in which participation is both encouraged and limited, so that working and learning together becomes a mix of controlled teamwork and genuine contribution, ranging across formal, semi-formal and informal arrangements and opportunities. Collaboration is officially held in high esteem in the school and both the headteacher and deputy use the concept in descibing their personal values. As the head put it: *'What we found was that we were very very influenced by the work..... on the culture of collaboration, of people working together. As I think both (the deputy) and I are very collaborative in nature it was the lines upon which we wanted the school to run.'*

She established what she called '*a very very clear structure (of teams)*' to get people working together. Those most apparent to us were:

- the management partnership between head and deputy. The intention is that the entire workload is planned and reflected upon in tandem so that the traditional division of tasks between head and deputy is avoided. This is seen as a key source of professional development and learning for the deputy headteacher ;

- year group teams (3 classes per year) which arrange their own meetings for the day-to-day running of their part of the school ;

- curriculum teams (in different curriculum areas, such as maths, language, creative arts) . Every teacher works in one or two curriculum teams which are responsible for implementing and monitoring the National Curriculum ;

- the school management team which includes year group leaders, curriculum team leaders, and other teachers with specific responsibilities for areas such as special educational needs, library, assessment, and bi-lingual teaching. This is used mainly for passing information from

the head to the teachers and vice versa, though occasionally it is also used as a 'think tank' to discuss problems or ideas. The stated intention is to flatten the hierarchy.

In addition, the entire staff comes together twice each month for meetings. The year groups and the curriculum teams keep records of each meeting, which are then given to the headteacher. Management team meetings and staff meetings are led by the head personally.

The head teacher, herself, mentioned several problems which arise from seeking contributions of all staff:

*'What we had was, within that system of allowing everyone to be involved in everything it was very difficult to move forward and what we began to identify was that often we would come to policy decisions which really didn't suit anybody because there were things that we had to do and you would get 'No, I don't agree with that!' and so you met in the middle. Policies were put together and then were put in the file and people went back to the classroom and did their own thing.'*

This illustrates the difficulties of trying to use collaborative processes to respond urgently to imposed change as well as to edge gradually towards likemindedness. It also points to ways in which the structure set parameters for a kind of truncated teamwork, a curtailed empowerment geared to product rather than processes. For example, when performance standards were introduced rapidly into the school this was not discussed in detail with the teachers. Instead, the head and deputy adapted national guidelines from the Department for Education and Employment and incorporated elements of schedules used by a local university for assessing students. As the headteacher said :

*'If we took this out to consultation which we have done with similar things before and everybody has a different opinion and what tends to happen is that you end up with a very mediocre half way measure .... but (the deputy) and I want high standards, we are people with very high ideals and high standards.'*

**Between control and contribution**

The above dilemma raises a central issue of how control and contribution are interrelated in the school. Contribution is defined by Churchman (1968) as responsible action by an individual that demands more than a specialized role, and that involves the construction of a desired future for the whole organisation. This kind of involvement in an organisation also goes beyond notions of co-operating with others on immediate work tasks. It is similar to Senge's (1992) concepts of *commitment* and *enrolment* through which members of organisations do much more than would be expected from mere compliance with their job descriptions, to concern themselves independently and creatively with the advancement of the entire organization.

However, as Senge (1992, p 222) notes, one cannot coerce another person to enrol, commit or contribute. Biott and Easen (1994) have made a similar point when comparing teachers' differing orientations towards school development planning. They have distinguished between a sense of belonging which comes from *' working and learning together in ways which emphasise choice, commitment and contribution'* and *'contractual membership" (p110)* which

involves working with others on tasks set by managers merely to fulfil a sense of obligation or duty.

We have defined 'control' for the purposes of this paper as *the reduction of uncertainty* and found it helpful to consider how uncertainty is experienced and dealt with in this school. .

The headteacher's urgency to address an explicit framework of external accountability requirements for inspection tends to makes her behave, at times, like a chief executive, yet at other times she shows a determination to maintain a leading professional role . This does seem to affect opportunities which staff might have to contribute independently and creatively to school development. Individuality and creativity are celebrated only if the resulting practice is within the bounds of acceptable variation. However, any anticipated increase in uncertainty will be in tension with the headteacher's concern to ensure that outcomes are aimed at national standards.

We have tried to describe a point in the history of the management of a new school in a way which has not tidied or oversimplified its complexity. It would be crass to suggest simply that the headteacher might be less controlling or that the staff should be allowed or encouraged to contribute more, without taking into account various pressures upon them. What does seem likely is that the relationship between contribution and control will continue to have both personal and situational dimensions.

More needs to be known about relationships between headteachers' control and staff contribution in changing circumstances. For example, Leithwood and Jantzi's (1990) suggestion that an equitable distribution of power is a *sine qua non* of a truly collaborative professional culture may now seem problematic if it is de-contextualised. In changing times, control and contribution may take many forms in school development. For example, Nias et al (1992) took a revised look at the role of headteachers, prior to the introduction of the national curriculum and OFSTED. They found that, in 'whole schools', headteachers exercised a controlling influence upon developments, and they did this in ways that the authors had formerly assumed were incompatible with collegial and democratic decision making. More recently Woods and Jeffries (1996) have discerned the growth of an embryonic professional discourse " to counter and neutralise the effects of managerialism" (p50) and to reaffirm values underpinning teachers' practice. As well as using strategies such as 'distancing', 'perceiving alternatives' and 'employing contrastive rhetoric', it involves transformations, rather than total condemnation, of tenets of managerialism. For example, rather than reject external regulation they may begin to shift its meaning, and instead of complying with quality assurance systems they may re-interpret the central concept to give it an acceptable meaning so that to teachers :

*" Quality is a matter of framework, some records, balance and adjustment, emotional attachment and moral worth. " ( Woods and Jeffries : p51)*

In the final section of this paper we offer two examples of how this one headteacher did cope creatively with the pressures of headship in order, first, to transform external regulation into a resource to enhance her own control, and, second, to accomplish an acceptable self identity in constrained circumstances.

**Transforming external regulation into a resource**

The imposition of a framework of external 'rules' has been used by the headteacher to reduce discretion of individual teachers and, at the same time, as a resource to show them that she is able to cope with projected uncertainties about the imminent inspection they are about to face. This tranformation can be understood through exploring how uncertainty is created, experienced and dealt with in the school.

The headteacher's use of external 'rules' of inspection is not being seen crudely as a way of overcoming recalcitrance amongst the school staff, but, as Salaman (1980) has argued, to "*co-ordinate situations where organisational members lack adequate knowledge of events and processes*" *(p141)*. This use of the concept of 'rule' emphasises how managers have an alternative resource to use, or not use, when employees' role expectations may not be relied upon to produce desirable consequences. In this case, the imposition of a framework of external 'rules' has been used by the headteacher to reduce discretion of individual teachers and to demonstrate, at the same time, that she is able to cope with the projected uncertainties they are about to face. Whilst there is an explicit framework of inspection criteria, a teachers' grapevine carries stories of variations in practice and generates doubts and anxieties in those awaiting their turn to be scrutinized. The headteacher had attended extra training events and seminars with other headteachers to gain additional information about patterns and trends in the conduct and outcomes of OFSTED inspections. Her knowledge and local interpretation of the broad framework is seen to be valuable, because there is insufficient confidence in official information available about a future event of such significance. In this sense, her power is structural rather than personal. Hickson et al (1973) have pinpointed three main factors which lead to high levels of structural power within their strategic contingency theory of intra-organisational power : a central position in relation to the key task (in this case, preparing for inspection); a low degree of replaceability ( being the only one with the necessary strategic overview) and ability to cope with the main area of uncertainty facing the organisation.

Prior to the need to prepare for the imminent inspection, the headteacher had already built a reputation for being well informed. She referred, herself, to the amount of time she spends '*reading .... research papers and things about the curriculum*' . The teachers do see her as having abundant ideas about educational practice, and the capacity to gain new information when it is needed : "*she might not have the idea herself but she has the ability to take things in, use them and put them out again ...a sort of clearing house*".. As she said, "*They look to me for guidance and to tell them what to do*".

Because of this, but, even more significantly, because she was known to have privileged knowledge of the likely events and processes of the forthcoming OFSTED inspection, the headteacher's guidance was sought to help with specific tasks such as classroom management and lesson preparation. This emphasises the sense of uncertainty felt by experienced teachers for whom, under normal circumstances, such things would be relatively unchallenging parts of their everyday work. In responding to them, the headteacher was able to re-interpret the 'external rules' shaping judgements of teachers' performance. She was able to meet her own priorities by assigning varying degrees of importance to different aspects. In keeping with her dual role she sometimes told or showed teachers what to do and at other times she described her strategy as 'fitting-in behind' or 'teaching behind'. This gave her opportunities to address her own concerns about control and so reduced her own sense of uncertainty. It also confirmed her centrality and pervasiveness. In this way the headteacher was transforming her own

anxieties about external control into a form of contingent internal control, re-assuring teachers and gaining their trust in return for responsible action.

**Accomplishing a self identity in constrained circumstances**

Mainly through the headteacher's narrative reconstructions and justificatory accounts, we have identified a form of organisational development characterised, on the one hand, by intensification of *action* to symbolise openness towards business efficiency, quality systems and external market concerns, and on the other hand, by continuous reference to a *theme* of developing practice through action research, collective caring and moral reponsiveness to challenging local, social circumstances.

According to the subsequent OFSTED report on the inspection of this school, decision-making could be improved by having clearer structures and processes in place, and by subject leaders being more effective in carrying out formal responsibilities. A contrasting perspective is to acknowledge the contributions that teachers make to whole school development through everyday work and within existing forms for interaction with each other as they carry out their daily tasks and solve shared problems of practical concern. The former view derives from the discourse of managerialism, while the latter celebrates a form of professional discourse, emphasising continuity within change and valuing professional leadership as a feature of membership. Our fieldwork suggests that connections between continuity and imposed change, and between the competing discourses of managerialism and professional leadership, can be understood by exploring the interplay, in the headteacher's narrative, between *theme* and *action* in this school.

The terms *theme* and *action* have been used by Pava (1986) within his model of 'non-synoptic change' which he claims is suited to explaining processes of change in conditions of complexity and conflict.. The non-synoptic model blends comprehensive, fragmented and incremental aspects of change. It involves three components : *theme, action* and *reflective matching*. The theme " *does not explicitly stipulate a particular outcome, nor does it directly challenge the continuation of current interests* " *(p620)*. In this primary school there is a broad social justice theme which incorporates a competitive dimension. It sometimes asserts explicitly and sometimes hints implicitly at an image of an improved school. It can be discerned in the liturgy of the school motto ' one world, one family, our school'. As this theme is repeatedly invoked, it embeds itself in daily conversations and into concrete events which help to shape its meaning. In keeping with a theme of this kind it contains no information, but, for those involved '*being devoid of information is not to be devoid of meaning*' (Pava 1986, p626).

In a similar way, 'action' is not simply a distinct result of pre-planning, nor is its precise nature always specified. It is made up of a shifting mix of regular scheduled meetings, unexpected opportunities, separate initiatives and whole school projects. Taken together theme and action are integral and interwoven parts of change itself, but their interrelationship is not only to be seen as directly causal. It is the third component, *refective matching*, which provides the kind of hindsight that "*allows the theme and action to inform each other*" (p621).

Layers of individual and shared experiences have accumulated in the school, and for the headteacher herself, the interplay between 'theme' and 'action' becomes part of her 'emplotment'; her narrative account of the school which helps her to learn what the school says about itself and what it does. It forms a key thread in her narrative account as she connects various events and episodes into a story line. Somers and Gibson (1994) stress the importance of 'emplotment' in the construction of social identities : *"in fact it is emplotment that allows us to construct a significant network or configuration of relationships"* (p60). This emplotment should not be seen simply as a non-theoretical sequencing of events. It is beyond the scope of this paper to explore in detail how headteachers construct their new professional identities , but it is a task to which we intend to return. A paper on that topic, however, would require a broader canvas incorporating other dimensions of social identity and for the narrative to be spoken more fully in the headteachers' own words. Pahl (1995) has recently given a lead in his case studies of how self identities are accomplished among those who are highly successful in the late modern world. Each of his cases exemplifies :

*" the iterative interaction between ontological narratives of actors - the way they make sense of their personal lives, defining what they should do in the context of whom they think they are - and the meta-narratives of the historical conjuncture in which they live - the end years of the Thatcher government and the collapse of the Berlin wall and all that followed from that. The main theme is the interrelations of the public and private " (p121)*

In our title for this paper we have use the verb 'accomplishing' to emphasise the active process of identity formation, and to avoid the notion of identity as a stable accomplishment or as a collective feature of category status of school headteacher or principal. The dynamic nature of identity is seen by Calhoun (1994*) " in the tensions within persons and among the contending cultural discourses that locate persons"* ( p28*)*. Identities, he argues, are often :

*" personal and political projects in which we participate, empowered to greater or lesser extents by resources of experience and ability, culture and social organisation"* (p28)

One engaging puzzle will be to try to understand the extent to which actors write their narratives and the narratives write their authors. In our case study, the headteacher's narrative confirms the kind of person she wants to be, interwoven with the kind of person she feels she has had to become. It conveys creativity in constrained circumstances, and it combines professional and managerial discourses both in the range of concepts used and in its concerns about dilemmas of style and strategy.

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